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## Long range planning for local roads

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation is beginning the process of updating *TransLinks21*, the long range transportation plan for the state of Wisconsin that was developed in November 1994. The updated long range plan will identify needs and policy directions using a 25 year planning horizon. The plan will be completed by the end of 2004 and will provide a vision for transportation through 2030.

As part of the update process, a separate Local Roads and Streets Element will be developed for the first time. The element will focus on the 100,000 mile network of roads under the jurisdiction of towns, villages, cities and counties. The Local Roads and Streets Element will complement other modal components of the long range plan including state highways, aviation, transit, waterborne freight, freight rail, passenger rail, bicycle, pedestrian and intermodal connections.

### **“... a separate Local Roads and Streets Element will be developed for the first time.”**

Emphasis areas for the local road system to be explored during the update process will consider:

- Current funding programs and levels
- The future role for the state
- Data needs and sources
- Performance objectives and thresholds
- Long range system needs

The pavement rating data that municipalities and counties recently supplied to WisDOT will

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*Rick Jones, Council Chair,  
Commissioner of Public  
Works, City of Racine*

## Message from the Council Chair

As we look back on 2001, we are extremely pleased with the outstanding response from local government in meeting the state's new pavement rating requirement. Prior to the mandated December 15th deadline for submitting pavement data, we believed that a 70% response rate by local governments would be the basis for judging our success. It is extremely gratifying to learn that 99.5% of all towns, villages, cities, and counties complied by submitting pavement data to the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT). This overwhelming response is the direct result of cooperative efforts among the LRSC, WisDOT, County Highway Commissioners, the Transportation Information Center at the University of Wisconsin, regional planning commissions, metropolitan planning organizations, local governments and their associations. This effort

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*Tom Carlsen, Acting Secretary,  
Wisconsin Department  
of Transportation*

## Message from WisDOT Acting Secretary Tom Carlsen

In my new role as Acting Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, I look forward to working with the Local Roads and Streets Council and local communities to improve the 100,000 mile network of local roads across the state. I have followed the activities of the council over the last six years while I was Director of WisDOT's Madison district office and I am committed to continuing the successes of the council. I met with the council leadership in April and came away from the meeting very impressed with the hard work, cooperation and insight that were displayed by council members. It was very clear to me through this discussion that there is a strong rapport among council members and they truly work together for the good of the entire state.

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## Long Range Planning for Local Roads

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be a critical item for the planning process. The data is being loaded into the local road database, known as the Wisconsin Information System for Local Roads (WISLR). WISLR will provide a first-ever statewide snapshot of current pavement ratings and will be the foundation for discussions of need on the local roads system.

The development of the local road element will also rely on other information stored in WISLR. The local road database includes pavement information on length, surface type and pavement width. Other attributes stored in WISLR include data on curbs, medians and shoulders. This information will be coupled with data on ownership and functional classification to provide a comprehensive understanding of the local road network in Wisconsin.

**“WISLR will provide a first-ever statewide snapshot of current pavement ratings and will be the foundation for discussions of need on the local roads system.”**

Based on data availability, future needs for the local road system will consider the following factors:

- Bridge conditions
- Geometrics
- Load restrictions
- Safety problems
- Bicycle and pedestrian accommodations
- Capacity and congestion problems
- Maintenance functions

An extensive public involvement process will help guide the development of the plan update. There will be four phases to the involvement process including identification of initial issues and reaction to plan alternatives, the draft plan and the final plan. Different public involvement techniques will be used by WisDOT including advisory

committees, public meetings, focus groups, stakeholder meetings and video conferences.

Ken Leonard, Director, WisDOT's Bureau of Planning, gave a presentation on the long range plan to the Local Roads and Streets Council at their March 13, 2002 meeting. Leonard asked the Local Roads and Streets Council to be actively involved in the development of the local roads element. The council looks forward to partnering with WisDOT to create a blueprint for enhancing the local road system for the next 25 years. Progress on the local road element will be monitored by the council and shared in future editions of this newsletter. The council encourages all interested people to be on the lookout for future meeting notices and participate in the planning process.

## Council Chair Message

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has not been duplicated in any other state and is a major step forward in addressing the issue of need within the local street system.

Although the WISLR program has been a success story, we certainly don't want to rest on our laurels. Therefore, we have set the following priorities for 2002 in no particular order:

- **Regulatory streamlining**  
See accompanying article by Emmer Shields
- **Best management practices**  
The opportunity to profile exemplary procedures and apply them elsewhere
- **Conflicting uses within public rights-of-way**  
Identify ways to best meet the competing needs for transportation, utility and maintenance activities
- **Project delivery streamlining**  
Improve the efficiency of the project management process by reducing engineering and administrative costs and streamlining policy and design requirements
- **The future of WISLR**  
Look for opportunities to apply roadway data to other transportation policy and planning activities

- **Overweight vehicles**  
Determine the magnitude, impacts and remedial activities for overweight vehicles on the local system
- **Federal reauthorization and its impact on local government**  
Track the relationships between the new federal transportation bill for 2004–2009 and the local communities in Wisconsin
- **The state budget crisis**  
Monitor the completion of the budget reform bill and its impact on transportation and local government
- **The council's relationship with the new WisDOT Secretary**  
Continue to develop a rapport with Acting Secretary Tom Carlsen and other staff within the department

In order to better address these priorities, I am proposing to reorganize the Council's structure into the following committees:

- **Executive Committee**  
Provide leadership to the council, prioritize and focus efforts, ensure consistent messages across all activities, and serve as the focal point for interaction with WisDOT
- **Local Transportation Financing**  
Monitor state and federal budget developments and recommend alternative funding mechanisms
- **Regulatory, Environmental and Legislative**  
Track and examine changes to regulations and policies that impact the local road network
- **Infrastructure Management**  
A new committee charged with tracking best management practices, GASB 34 requirements and other issues affecting stewardship of the transportation system
- **Education and Communication**  
Develop outreach mechanisms to expand awareness and expertise on council issues

This revised committee structure will allow the Council to better address the changing priorities facing local transportation officials. The LRSC membership is committed to continuing its efforts to improve the efficiency and cost effectiveness of providing a local transportation system to the citizens of our state.

## Acting Secretary Message

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I will continue to work hard at the national level on reauthorization of the federal transportation bill in an effort to bring as many transportation dollars to Wisconsin as possible. Beth Nachreiner, the WisDOT Federal/State Relations Coordinator, provided a status report on our efforts for reauthorization at the council meeting in May. I want to continue this dialog with the council, and all local communities across Wisconsin, as we lay the groundwork for how federal transportation programs will function for the next six years. Your input and concerns regarding the needs of the local road network in Wisconsin are always welcomed and encouraged.

This feedback is not only important for reauthorization, but also for WisDOT's update of the long-range transportation plan. The addition of the local road element (see accompanying article) and the utilization of the WISLR database in the long-range transportation plan will go a long way towards addressing the needs of the local road network.

**"Your input and concerns regarding the needs of the local road network in Wisconsin are always welcomed and encouraged."**

I want to once again thank the communities in Wisconsin for their outstanding response to the requirement to submit pavement rating data to WisDOT. I am proud to report that almost all counties and municipalities complied with the statutory requirement. This information is crucial as we begin to develop a local road element as part of our Long Range Transportation Plan. The data will provide a baseline from which to develop a comprehensive understanding of local road needs in the state. The Local Roads and Streets Council also deserves a large part of the credit. Their hard work and dedication in leading the effort of educating and informing all levels of local government about the need for this information is unmatched anywhere. The result of this effort is a database of information about local roads that will impact state/local road policy for years to come.

## Environmental Streamlining

*By Emmer Shields, Chair  
LRSC Regulatory, Environmental  
and Legislative Committee*

Thirty years ago, at the beginning of my engineering career, the preparation for a highway project consisted primarily of determining a route, performing the engineering design and preparing the plans, specifications and bid documents. The environment and the impacts of the highway upon the environment were far from major considerations in most cases.

A ground swell of societal concern for the environment over the last several decades has created a host of new environmental standards and requirements. Today, there are numerous regulatory agencies administering an ever-increasing number of environmental regulations. No highway projects are unaffected by environmental regulations and project development isn't just engineering anymore. The environment and environmental regulations are major considerations on every highway project.

There is no question on whether the environment should be protected. It is clear that our society has made a commitment to environmental protection in all sectors, including transportation. There is a question, however, on how this environmental protection can best be achieved and how we balance environmental considerations with other societal needs such as safe roads, streets, and highways. Both those who help build and maintain highways and those who are engaged in environmental protection are serving the public interest and they need to work together to ensure that public resources are used efficiently and effectively. Unfortunately, as is too often the case, there are breakdowns on both sides, delays, increased costs, and unsatisfactory outcomes.

"Environmental Streamlining" is the term used to describe the effort to improve and better define the interaction between environmental regulations and those being regulated. It is not an effort to lessen or eliminate environmental regulations.

It is an effort to better use public resources by "streamlining" the process.

Currently, the LRSC Regulatory, Environmental and Legislative (REAL) Committee is looking at Environmental Streamlining from two perspectives. The first is the much-publicized effort for Environmental Streamlining at the federal level. Environmental Streamlining was a policy objective of TEA-21, the federal transportation bill for 1998-2003. The initial proposals for "streamlining" were almost universally panned by state departments of transportation. The proposal contained a whole new consideration dubbed "Environmental Justice." Most critics felt that far from streamlining the process, the initial proposals actually made the process even more cumbersome and difficult.

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## WISLR launch expected in August 2002

The Wisconsin Information System for Local Roads (WISLR) database is expected to be launched in August 2002. Once available, users will have the ability to view data and print reports and maps. Rudimentary pavement analysis is also expected to be available in August 2002. The analysis tool will provide the ability to summarize and query pavement condition information. In order to obtain data editing privileges, WISLR training will be required. Training is expected to occur in fall 2002 and/or winter 2003. Be on the lookout for notices announcing WISLR training sessions.



## Environmental Streamlining

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The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) under the leadership of Administrator Mary Peters has made Environmental Streamlining one of the three top priorities for FHWA. There are also attempts being made by many at the federal and state level to include Environmental Streamlining as part of the transportation reauthorization package. How these efforts will impact project development remains to be seen and quite often there are vast differences between expected outcomes and actual outcomes. (For more information on Environmental Streamlining, you can go to the FHWA website at <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/strmlng/index.htm>).

The second point of interest for the REAL Committee is the interaction of environmental regulations at the project level. The primary focus is what can be done to streamline the process for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources' (WisDNR's) review and approval of local, federally funded transportation projects. Environmental Streamlining at the federal level will mean little if the same kind of commitment is not put forward at the state level. The REAL Committee hopes to engage the WisDNR in discussions on how to improve the current process. Ideas include better scoping of projects and earlier identification of potential environmental problems to eliminate reworking project plans and more involvement for the WisDNR in the development of solutions to the sometimes complex and conflicting problems at the project level.

Efforts at the federal level may enable or free state officials to streamline the project development process, but the Wisconsin Department of Transportation and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources will have to work together to take advantage of the opportunities presented by changes at the federal level. Without a state-led effort, little or no change may actually occur at the project level. The REAL Committee hopes to be a driving force for Environmental Streamlining on Wisconsin's local projects.



## Calendar of events

**Local Roads and Streets Council meetings** are held every other month in the city council chambers in Wisconsin Rapids beginning at 10 a.m.

The meeting schedule for the remainder of 2002 is: July 10, September 4, and November 6. Interested people are invited to attend council meetings. Please contact Brian Zirbes, WisDOT, at 608.264.8426 to confirm meeting dates and times.

**September 19–20, 2002: Wisconsin Alliance of Cities Meeting**, La Crosse Center, La Crosse.

**September 22–25, 2002: Wisconsin Counties Association Annual Convention**, Midwest Express Center, Milwaukee.

**September 23–26 and October 1–3: One day Winter Road Maintenance workshops** provided by the University of Wisconsin Transportation Information Center at seven sites across the state.

**October 13–16, 2002: Wisconsin Towns Association Annual Convention**, Radisson Hotel and Convention Center, La Crosse.

**October 23–25, 2002: League of Wisconsin Municipalities Annual Conference**, Marriott West, Middleton.

**November 13–15, 2002: Fall Conference of the Wisconsin Chapter of the American Public Works Association**, Radisson Paper Valley Hotel, Appleton.

## Going electronic



Just a reminder that the Local Roads and Streets Council Newsletter is now available exclusively in an electronic format. The newsletter is being sent out via e-mail to the addresses we have on file in our newsletter distribution list. The newsletter is also available on the Internet through the WisDOT Web site at [www.dot.state.wi.us](http://www.dot.state.wi.us)

(Look for the "News" section).

Copies of previous issues of the newsletter will also be available on the Internet soon. To add or change e-mail addresses in the newsletter distribution list, please contact the Local Roads and Streets Council via e-mail at [lrsc@dot.state.wi.us](mailto:lrsc@dot.state.wi.us), or call Brian Zirbes, WisDOT, at 608.264.8426. Over time, the newsletter will also be available through the WisDOT Web site.

Please note that the recently mailed LRSC postcard contained an incorrect e-mail address. Please send any e-mail regarding the LRSC Newsletter to [lrsc@dot.state.wi.us](mailto:lrsc@dot.state.wi.us)

**Please e-mail the council with your questions to [lrsc@dot.state.wi.us](mailto:lrsc@dot.state.wi.us) or contact:**

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